

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium’s (SBAC) vision for a new generation assessment system—one that includes a set of balanced components that can be adapted to meet students’ needs across participating States—is rooted in a concern for the valid, reliable, and fair assessment of the deep disciplinary understanding and higher-order thinking skills that are increasingly demanded by a knowledge-based global economy. This vision also is based on the belief that assessment must support ongoing improvements in instruction and promote meaningful learning experiences for students that lead to outcomes valued by all stakeholders.

The overarching goal of the SBAC is to ensure that all students leave high school prepared for postsecondary success in college or a career through a planned sequence of educational experiences and opportunities. To meet this goal, with support from institutions of higher education (IHEs) and workplace representatives, the Consortium will build upon the strong foundation in each participating State to create a high-quality, balanced multi-state assessment system based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The role of the Consortium in this process is to guide the development and implementation of an assessment system that reshapes educational practice in participating States in strategic ways and leads to improved learning outcomes for students.

Following the principle of “responsible flexibility,” SBAC will provide options for customizable system components while also ensuring comparability of high-stakes summative test results across States. In addition, the Consortium is committed to creating a policy environment that fosters innovation while supporting the development of accountability systems that incentivize the right behaviors for students, teachers, and administrators and avoid inadvertently incentivizing behaviors that run counter to SBAC goals.

The comprehensive assessment system proposed by the Consortium calls for strategic use of a variety of item types and performance events to measure the full range of the CCSS and to ensure accurate assessment of all students, including students with disabilities, English learners, and low- and high-performing students. Specifically, SBAC proposes to implement a system that features the following:

- Common CCSS-based computer adaptive summative assessments that make use of technology-enhanced item types and teacher-developed and scored performance events;
- Computer adaptive interim/benchmark assessments—reflecting learning progressions or

content clusters—that provide more in-depth and/or mid-course information about what students know and can do in relation to the CCSS;

- Research-supported instructionally sensitive tools, processes, and practices developed by State educators that can be used formatively at the classroom level to improve teaching and increase learning;
- Focused ongoing support to teachers through professional development opportunities and exemplary instructional materials linked to the CCSS;
- Online reporting and tracking system that enables access to key types of information about student progress toward college- and career-readiness and about specific strengths and limitations in what students know and are able to do at each grade level; and
- Cross-State communications network to inform stakeholders about SBAC activities and ensure a common focus on the goal of college- and career-readiness for all students.

In a number of ways, innovative and efficient use of technology serves as the backbone of this balanced assessment system: (1) SBAC’s system capitalizes on the precision and efficiency of computer adaptive testing; (2) the expanded use of technology enables the Consortium’s goals of developing innovative and real-world item types that ensure measurement of student achievement across a wide performance continuum and provide efficiencies and enhancements for teacher and administrator professional development and capacity building at the local level; and (3) through use of an interoperable electronic platform and leveraging of cross-State resources, SBAC can deliver assessments and produce both standardized and customizable reports that are cost-effective, timely, and useful for a range of audiences in tracking and analyzing the progress towards college- and career-readiness of individual students, student subgroups, classrooms, schools, districts, and States.

In summary, SBAC’s proposed learning and assessment system is grounded in a sound Theory of Action. This system promotes research-supported instructional practice and incorporates a balanced set of technology-supported tools, innovative assessments, and state-of-the-art classroom support mechanisms that work coherently to support teaching and learning. Over time, with a purposeful governing structure and IHEs in participating States, this Consortium’s assessment system holds promise to effect the types of reform sought by the Race to the Top Assessment Program.